

Rules of the Game

All About Clerics (Part Three)

By Skip Williams



Last week we concluded our look at preparing cleric spells. This week, we'll conclude this series with a look at spontaneous spells, clerical domains, domain powers, and undead turning.

Spontaneous Spells

As noted in Part One, a cleric doesn't need to prepare a spontaneous spell in advance. Instead, the cleric merely substitutes the spontaneous spell for a previously prepared spell of the same or higher level. For example, if a cleric want to spontaneously cast a *cure moderate wounds* spell (a 2nd-level spell), he must give up a prepared spell of 2nd-level or higher to do so.

It's reasonable to allow a cleric to use a spell slot that has been left empty after daily spell preparation and ready to be filled with a spell (see Part Two) for a spontaneous spell; however, the rules don't say you can do that.

The cleric doesn't have to do anything special to cast a spontaneous spell. He simply uses whatever casting time is required for the spell he is actually casting. For example, he uses one standard action to cast a spontaneous *cure light wounds* spell, no matter what the casting time for whatever prepared spell the *cure light wounds* replaces happens to be.

You can apply any metamagic feat the cleric knows to a spontaneous spell. To do so, you must use a spell slot of the spell's modified level. For example, a maximized spontaneous *cure light wounds* spell requires a 4th-level spell slot. Casting a spontaneous spell modified with metamagic is a full-round action if the modified spell had a casting time of 1 standard action or less. If the modified spell has a casting time longer than 1 standard action, the modified spell takes an extra full-round action to cast (see page 88 in the *Player's Handbook*). Because of the minimum casting time of a full-round action, it's a waste to try to quicken a spontaneous spell.

Domains and Domain Powers

As noted in Part One, a cleric chooses two domains from the list of domains his deity makes available. If the cleric has no deity, the cleric simply chooses any two domains available in the campaign. DMs should feel free to limit the cleric's choices. Remember that you cannot choose one of the alignment domains (Chaos, Evil, Good, and Law) unless the cleric has the corresponding alignment. When you choose a domain, all the spells in that domain become part of the cleric's class spell list for purposes of using spell completion and spell trigger magic items (see Rules of the Game, Using Magic Items, [Part Two](#)).

Treat domain powers as class features. Any level-based variables the power has equal his cleric level. If he becomes an ex-cleric (see page 33 in the *Player's Handbook*), he loses his domain powers. When a domain gives a cleric a caster level increase, he doesn't gain any extra spellcasting abilities. Instead, all level-based

variables for the affected spells increase according to his increased caster level. For example, if you have a 3rd-level cleric with the **Healing domain** and he casts a *cure light wounds* spell, he will heal 1d8+4 points of damage with the spell because his caster level is effectively 4th. His caster level increase affects all the level-based variables the spell has, including range, damage, size of area, and number of targets; exactly which aspects of the spell are affected depends on the spell. See the spell's description for details. If the spell can be **dispelled**, use the cleric's increased **caster level** to set the **DC** for any caster level checks another character makes to dispel the spell.

When a domain gives the cleric an extra **class skill**, you effectively add the listed skill to the cleric class skill list. When you spend skill points from the cleric class, you can buy the listed skill as a class skill (at one rank per point spent). Having a skill as a class skill through a domain doesn't help you when spending skill points from any other class that you might have.

When a domain gives the cleric a special turning ability (such as the ability to affect certain **elemental** creatures), his daily uses of that ability are in addition to any **undead** turning he can use for the day. He can use the Extra Turning feat to gain extra uses of both his special turning ability and his ability to affect undead (see the Extra Turning feat description). For example, if you have a cleric with a **Charisma** score of 14 and the **Air domain**, he can effect undead five times a day (3 + his Charisma modifier of +2) and he can affect earth or air creatures five times a day. If he takes the Extra Turning feat, he can affect undead nine times a day and he can affect earth or air creatures nine times a day. The greater turning ability from the **Sun domain** isn't an extra turning attempt (it simply changes how the cleric's undead turning ability works), and it's not subject to the Extra Turning feat.

Turning Undead

Good clerics (or neutral clerics who have chosen to spontaneously cast *cure* spells) have the ability to turn undead. Pages 159-169 in the *Player's Handbook* cover undead turning in considerable detail. Here are some additional notes. The material in this section applies equally to special turning abilities from domain abilities (see previous section).

A cleric turns undead as a standard action that doesn't provoke an **attack of opportunity**. Doing so requires him to present his holy symbol. The rules don't specify exactly what that entails. Common sense suggests that presenting his holy symbol involves holding the symbol in his hand (or what passes for a hand) and holding it up in plain sight (or what would pass for plain sight if anyone could see him; but see the **D&D** FAQ for the question regarding *greater invisibility* and turning).

Turning works something like a spell with an area (he doesn't need to see the undead he affects, but he needs line of effect to them) and something like a spell that affects multiple targets (he affects undead with a limited number of Hit Dice, with the undead closest to him affected first). You may find it helpful to treat a turning attempt as a 60-foot burst to some extent, though be wary about how far you take the similarities since substantial differences do exist (see the glossary or Rules of the Game, Reading Spell Descriptions, [Part Five](#); also see the **D&D** FAQ for a question about bursts and turning). As with any burst, the center can be any grid intersection in the space he occupies. Only undead that are in the burst at the time he makes the turning attempt are affected. He affects only as many undead as his turning check and turning damage rolls allow. As noted earlier, undead closest to the cleric are affected first. If he doesn't have enough **Hit Dice** available to affect a creature, there's no effect, and he cannot use those dice to affect another, more distant undead creature that's inside the burst.

According the rules, evil clerics (or neutral clerics who have chosen to spontaneously use **inflict spells**) have the

ability to **rebuke** or **command** undead. They also can use rebuke attempts to dispel a turning effect on an undead creature. The rules don't say so, but there's no reason a good cleric can't dispel an evil cleric's rebuke effect on an undead or dispel an evil cleric's control over an undead creature by making a successful turn attempt against that creature, just as noted on page 159 of the *Player's Handbook*.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of *Dragon Magazine* for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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